



The year 2020 will undoubtedly be remembered as a time of unparalleled disruption because of the coronavirus pandemic – a health and economic crisis like no other – that has dramatically impacted lives and livelihoods.

It's alarming to think, therefore, that even before COVID-19, the world was already facing an urgent existential crisis due to our looming climate emergency. Against the backdrop of rising inequality, the collapse of critical ecosystems and biodiversity loss, a resurgence in racial tensions and growing concern about global food security, humanity feels more threatened than ever – just when we're at our most vulnerable.

Regrettably, global governance is broken, precisely when we need it most. International political cooperation is lacking, multilateral institutions are marginalized and leaders of courage and principle are in worrying short supply – too often playing not to lose by protecting the status quo, rather than playing to win. No wonder trust is at an all-time low in many parts of society, which has given rise to increasing protests, voter apathy and the gradual erosion of confidence in globalization as a force for growth and prosperity.

It would be easy to become despondent in the grip of such paralyzing challenges. Yet, we shouldn't lose hope – not least as we have never been so forewarned and forearmed, with exponential advancements in technology and science, in particular, at the ready to help alter our trajectory and scale the solutions needed.

But there is one resource more than any other that should give us confidence about the prospects for positive change. An unlimited reserve of talent, ingenuity, innovation and idealism that challenges the old, embraces the new and dares to push the limits of what's possible. And that is young people – who in time-honored tradition have always been the ones to redesign the future in their own image, simultaneously creating a better world for everyone.

Over half the world's population is below 30 years old and – as we have seen from the youth climate movement – they are agitating and mobilizing like never before. We should welcome their energy, creativity, passion and self-belief. We should embolden their innate ability to accept uncertainty. And we should encourage their voracious appetite for collaboration and partnerships, which we know are key to unlocking progress on our biggest social and environmental challenges.

More purpose-driven, tolerant, open and accountable than any generation before them, they understand that being a great leader is above all about being a great human being. They do not accept the false trade-off between people and planet, and instead hold an evangelical belief in the harmony of our human and natural capital. And more than anything, they have the wisdom and humility to recognize that by putting the interests of others ahead of their own, they are also ultimately better off.

We are truly blessed to have so many gifted young people at this crucial time in history. Now is the moment not only to give them a seat at the leadership table, but to give them the full levers of power altogether.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Paul Polman  
Co-founder & Chair  
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